

*"It's fun to study
history...
It fills you in on the
stuff you missed."*

9th Grader, Webutuck

January, 2007

In This Issue...

The Amenia Historical Society continues its investigation of each of its hamlets.

Previously, AHS has visited Perry's Corners, Wassaic and Smithfield. This winter, AHS continues in Leedsville and Amenia Union.

- **Before Leedsville was Leedsville:**

Charles E. Benton and our own John Quinn tell of the earliest days of Leedsville.

- **Mills in Leedsville**
- **Industrial Prosperity Slips Away**

- **In the Next Issue:**

Leedsville Farms –Then and Now

Benton Family

Spingarn

NAACP at Troutbeck

Amenia Field Day

Weekenders

Leedsville's Famous Residents

Amenia Historical Society

...where what was old is new again

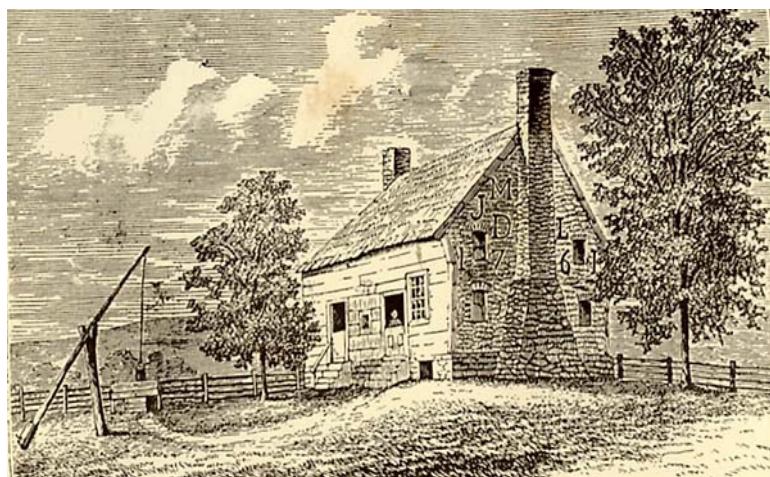
Special Winter Issue

Before LEEDSVILLE was LEEDSVILLE...

The Webutuck Creek, running its southward course down the Oblong Valley, was the well spring of Leedsville, Amenia's most prosperous hamlet in the 18th century.

But before the first white settlers, the stream and its woodland banks teemed with wild life that provided a variety of furs and skins for Native Americans of the area. Extensive hunting and trapping were to continue well into the 1900's.

Charles E. Benton wrote in his booklet, *Troutbeck - a Dutchess County Homestead**, "...This land was ceded by Connecticut to New York in 1731, and New York immediately sold the tract to a land company, and allotments of the land were made to individuals of the Company. The first known occupant was Captain William Young...in 1765 he built a frame house. The location of the land later became known as Troutbeck... Young also founded a tannery and set aside part of his residence as a tavern.



Delemater House - from a sketch by Myron Benton about 1860

Tradition says that in those primitive days carpenter's tools were scarce, and that in making the frame for this house but three implements were employed: the axe for cutting and hewing the timbers and chopping the tenons, the post axe for making the mortises, and the auger for boring the pin holes. The siding was made secure by hand-made nails of wrought iron, and there was a substantial chimney and fire place at each end."

*Dutchess County Historical Society *Historical Monographs*: No. 1 1916

Available Publications:

[Early History of Amenia by Newton Reed](#)

[Amenia Cookbook](#)

[Lake Amenia Booklet Reprint](#)

[Finding Aid for Amenia's Historical & Cultural Resources](#)

[Also a selection of postcards](#)

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MEETINGS IN 2007

March or April (a Sunday afternoon)

Come to Troutbeck for TEA PARTY.

A walk around the manor house, led by Margaret Quinn, will be followed by a presentation on Leedsville, Troutbeck and the famous meetings of the NAACP.

Garret Corcoran will share some important NAACP documents.

MILLS in LEEDSVILLE

It was in 1749 that John Delemaeter built a mill along the meandering waterway. As a sawmill it met the first needs of the early settlers and then as the farms spread, mill stones were installed to take over the primitive labor of pounding corn, wheat and rye. The farmers' visits to the gristmill gave impetus to the economic and social life of the hamlet.

In the early 1800's England's naval blockade of American ports cut off the market for wool, prompting a group of local men, headed by Rufus Park, to start a woolen mill on the Webutuck. It proved to be short-lived for when the war with England ended and trade was resumed the factory was sold and converted for dressing cloth.

Interestingly, the most lasting impact of the mill was the fact that it was from an Englishman of Leeds, brought over to manage the factory, that the hamlet got its name.

A decade or so later William Morehouse erected a two-story brick mill down on the bend in the river. Known as the Union Mill, it served as a gristmill for the area for some 70 years.



Union Mill as the building appeared in the 1970's shortly before demolition

INDUSTRIAL PROSPERITY IN THE VALLEY SLIPS AWAY

Despite the prosperity brought to the settlement by the Webutuck, not everything worked out for the hamlet. In 1827, at the height of the canal boom in the north east, a group of speculators floated the idea of the Sharon Canal to link the area to New York City.

The proposal included using the Webutuck Creek as the initial link in the waterway. Some \$60,000 was raised before the canal plan was abandoned. Leedsville was *not* to be a canal town.

Leedsville suffered another set back in 1835 when Payne's Corner on the Poughkeepsie Turnpike was chosen as the location for the Amenia Seminary. Some idea of the impact of this decision on the people of Leedsville is suggested by the apocryphal story that the group deciding the school's site sealed their decision in an envelope with instructions to open only after they had left town.

May (another Sunday afternoon)

St. Thomas Episcopal Church and AHS proudly present a brief history of Amenia Union.

Legendary local historian Ester Pollard and history professor Lori Nussdorfer team up to give a special lecture at St. Thomas Episcopal Church.

Contribute your information, stories or reminiscences about Leedsville for the next issues of our newsletter.

Have you lived in Leedsville? Do you have photos?

Did you know Amy Spingarn?

Mark your Calendar now:

August 11, 2007

Exhibition Vintage

Baseball Game

at Indian Rock Schoolhouse

Costumes & Rules of 1860 and 1890

In the mid 19th century another blow to the hamlet was the decision to run the railroad into Amenia Village rather than through Leedsville. Still the proximity of the rails benefited the hamlet in moving its produce and freight in and out of the community, eliminating the long trip to Poughkeepsie which had been costly in time and money.

In the Next Issues:

The farms of Leedsville- then and now: *special research by Mary Ellen Downey*

The Bentons : Farmers and Poets *by Ann Linden*

Spingarn: NAACP at Troutbeck *by John Quinn*

With Garrett Corcoran, manager at Troutbeck

Amenia Field Day

The Leedsville Resorts and Boarding Houses

The Voices of Second Home Owners and “Weekenders”

Leedsville's famous residents



Although each hamlet of Amenia has been the home of outstanding citizens, past & present, Leedsville's two most famous families – the Bentons in the 19th century and the Spingarns in the 20th - attracted friends and acquaintances of world wide fame. Find out in future issues who they were and why they came to Leedsville.

Left: Amy Spingarn, poet, Suffragette, artist and lady of the manor at Troutbeck in the early 20th century.

BOOKS on Local History by the Local Experts

All books are available at local book stores

(Millbrook Historical Society)

Rural Life in the Hudson River Valley 1890 – 1910 ed. by Virgina Benham

Augerson & Stanley Benham, Jr. Hudson Press , 2005

Farm life on Tower Hill and environs in the late 19th, early 20th centuries

(Dover Historical Society)

Up on Preston Mountain Dick and Joe Polhemus

Purple Mountain Press, 2005

Pioneers and Farmers who farmed the top of East (Preston) Mountain

(Roeliff Jansen Historical Society)

The Fagan Sisters, A History of Life in a New York Country Village

by Elinor Mettler Arcadia, 2000

Life in Copake Falls at the turn of the twentieth century

(Sharon Historical Society)

Twice told tales by Ed Kirby

Sharon Historical Society, 2004

Stories of some of Sharon's more colorful characters

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